

Philosophy 4, Introduction to Ethics
Fall, 2009
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Paper Prompt #2

In her discussion of abortion J.J. Thomson focuses on what precisely it may mean to have a “Right to Life.” She proposes several definitions, finding problems with the first two and settling on a third. **Present and explain all three definitions, including the inadequacies of the first two.**

Having settled on the third definition of a right to life J.J. Thomson posits that *under certain circumstances* respecting such a right to life could weigh against the moral permissibility of an abortion (we will ignore her distinction between “indecent” and “impermissible”). **Present and explain** J.J. Thomson’s view of how the mother’s level of *responsibility* for the presence of the fetus might affect the *permissibility* of abortion.

Finally: Do you agree with her view regarding the relationship between responsibility and permissibility of abortion? If so, **explain why** and **suggest a way that her position might be made more specific** (for example: are there any factors which she has not addressed which are relevant, and how might they affect permissibility?). If you don’t agree, **explain why not** and **suggest how the theory would have to be changed to reflect your view**. (for example, is there a factor relevant to the permissibility of abortion that she has ignored?).

Suggested Outline:

One paragraph of introduction. This is short and to the point, simply a few sentences telling the reader what the focus and intent of the paper is.

Section 1. 1-1.5 pages:

Present and explain all three proposed definitions. Use your paragraph structure to distinguish each definition and explanation. Don’t forget to describe any thought experiments involved, don’t assume the reader is familiar with them!

Section 2. 1.5-2 pages:

Present and explain Thomson’s view on the connection between her accepted definition of a **“right to life,”** the mother’s level of **responsibility** for the pregnancy, and the **permissibility** of abortion.

Present and explain your own view **on this specific issue** and how it coincides or differs from Thomson’s, including how in your view one might add specificity to the theory, or how your view necessitates some changes to the theory.

Don’t forget to review the helpful hints from the first paper prompt. To be found online here:

http://www.philosophy.ucsb.edu/websites/phil4/Paper_Prompt_1.pdf